

Keys to the Qur'an

Volume 1

Commentary on Surah Fatiha and Surah Baqarah

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CHAPTER 1

Surat Al-Fatiha (The Opening): Introduction

This *surah*² (chapter) is placed at the beginning of the Qur'an because it signifies the opening of knowledge and so the victory over ignorance. If, in the direction we are taking, there is no door, then we have reached our target – we have won.

Fatiha means to open, reveal, imbue, and conquer. This *surah* is so named because if you follow it in your heart, you will be victorious. You will conquer and an opening will come to you.

2 In this book, we provide English translation of the Qur'anic *ayat* (verses; signs).

CHAPTER 1

Surat Al-Fatiha (The Opening)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

1. In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

2. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds,

Hamd is praise. Praise comes if there is knowledge. You can only praise something if you have knowledge of it. Knowledge of something is an aspect of experience. You praise the *rabb*, the lord-sustainer. *Rabba* means to be master of, to have command over. It also means to raise and bring up. *Rabb* is the attribute of that entity which brings what is under its domain up to its full potential, towards the ultimate end which is *hanna*, He, because it has come from Him, from Allah.

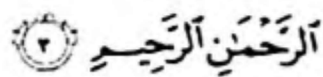
We said that when you praise the Ultimate, you must have some knowledge of it. That knowledge could be that of avoiding the non-Ultimate, which is what we are trying to do now. The way to that knowledge is by avoiding that which is unreal, uncondusive, unfulfilling; that which does not permanently rehabilitate our hearts.

Up to a certain point, it is alright to praise an aspect of it since we do not have complete cognizance of *rabb*. If we are true to ourselves, we aim for the ultimate in everything. We

only want to praise the Ultimate.

Real praise belongs only to the Lord-sustainer, and that which sustains the foundation of *Tawheed* (Unity). When you say, *Al hamdu lilla*, you are only stating the fact that praise is indeed for Allah. Furthermore, you are only able to praise in the first place because you mirror Allah and His Attributes, since you are the created being, having been created by the Creator, Allah. When you abuse the use of *hamd*, instead of *shukr*, you reveal your own shatteredness, for if you have truly witnessed that, *La ilaha il Allah*, you will understand that Allah's mercy comes not only in *bast*, expansion, but also in *qabd*, constriction, and you will recognize that above all else Allah is truly *ar Rahman ar Rahim*, so that every state reflects the mercy of Allah. This explains why it says: *Al hamdu lillahi rabb il 'alamin*. *'Alamin* encompasses all states, all worlds, in the seen and the unseen, in sleep and in wakefulness, here and in the hereafter.

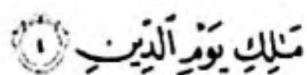
The man of greater perception sees the *rabb*, Sustainer, even in times of constriction. To use *hamd* as an expression of a mood or feeling is *shirk*. Praise is for Allah at all times and under all circumstances. *Hamd* does not allow for the separation between you as a praise giver and the object of praise: you merely echo *hamd*.



3. The Beneficent, the Merciful.

The characteristics of the Lord whom we love and adore are *ar-Rahman ar-Rahim*, the all-beneficent, the all-compassionate. There is only mercy, but we do not see it because of our ignorance, expectations, and desires which only arise from the use of our intellect. Was the mercy not there when you were in your mother's womb? You stayed there for nine months and yet you were unequivocally content. It is the mercy of Creation that we are able to die, so that there may be breathing and standing space for others to come. It is only we who interfere.

It is the ego, the *nafs*, the vanity of expectation which frustrates and sabotages our recognition of Allah's mercy. It is the evil "P" which we hear whispering in our ear. *Shaytan* is only a name. He too is from the Creator. If you know how to tackle *Shaytan*, then you would see nothing other than *ar-Rahman*. There is a cult in the Middle East of some two to three million people that worship *Shaytan*. They say that we know the Lord through *Shaytan*, and that at the *Yَوْم al Qiyama*, *Shaytan* will be forgiven because he has been testing all the good ones and the bad ones. They say he will be the first to be forgiven. If you see anything other than mercy, it is your own doing. It is your own expectations, desires and illusions. You yourself are the author.



4. Master of the Day of Judgment,

Malik means owner, master. We come from the Owner. We own nothing, but are all owned. *Yَوْم ad Deen*: the day of the *Deen*. *Yَوْم* is not only a day, but also a span of time. *Deen*, life-transaction, finds its root in *dana*, to owe, be indebted to. It is the debt of man to want to recognize reality. It is incumbent upon every one of us to know how to pay the debt upon us.

The *deen* with Allah is Islam. It is a life-transaction. Our way of behaving towards ourselves and towards others is *deen*. It is the way of correct transaction. But if you cannot discipline yourself, you cannot be of any use to anybody else. If interaction is not at least two-dimensional, nothing will work. You will only accumulate more wealth and cultivate more attachment. Eventually, you will be toppled over. Therefore, you have to exercise yourself in order to discipline yourself. The inner discipline begins with the outer discipline. This is the meaning of *deen*. The outer is easier because if you yourself do not stop from overshooting the limits, someone else will. It is the inner that is more difficult, so we start with the outer in order to gain the inner meaning. We go from the gross to the subtle.

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ ﴿٥﴾

**5. You (alone) we worship; You (alone) we ask
for help.**

Once you recognize that you are in love and you are worshipping the *rabb*, you admit it openly, we worship You and we depend upon You. If you are worshipping and you are in love, then you are in adoration. *Abada* is to worship, adore, serve, and in its second form, it means to make accessible. You depend upon the Merciful. This is only meaningful if there is knowledge, for otherwise it can be considered a tyranny.

أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٦﴾

6. Show us the straight path,

Show us the direct way. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. A straight line is also one point traveling in only one direction. Therefore, you ask to be shown the most direct route towards this knowledge.

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧﴾

**7. The path of those whom You have favored; Not the
(path) of those who earn Your anger nor of those who
go astray.**

Sirat al ladhina an'amta 'aleyhim, is the way of those upon whom delight has been bestowed, not those upon whom anger burns. *Na'ma* is delight, happiness. There is no anger in this life. If you do not see mercy, then you have brought darkness upon yourself. Your ignorance is not the fault of someone else. If you do something inane and as a consequence harm comes to you, then Reality is angry with you, angry in the sense that you are not in unification with it. Anger implies a high degree of discontent on the part of one entity with another, which leads

to severing of the relationship between the two.

There is only Allah. There is only Reality. Consequently, there is no place for superstition. It is you who decide whether Allah is angry with you. *Rahma* must encompass everything. Your loss is, in fact, within that *rahma*. The condition you are in is appropriate because you have brought it about by your heart. This is cosmos, not chaos. It is total ecology. As human beings, we are all occasionally at a loss and often unsure. It is for this reason that we have to keep healthy and correct companionship. Existentially, we need guidance.

Surat al Fatiha can be divided into three sections. The first section includes the opening line up to *Maliki yowm ad Deen*. It is an exposition of reality. You find yourself awakened suddenly and you say: I am in gratitude, praise to Allah, Who has these attributes. You are inspired after having been in wilderness and bewilderment, so you say, *Al hamdu lillahi rabb al 'alamin*, out of contentment and sanity. In the next section, (from *Iyyaka na'budu wa iyyaka nastain* to *Ihdina as-Sirat al-Mustaqim*), you are the adorer, the *'abd*. This now is transaction and demand. It is a request, it is action. In this section the heart cries out. The third part is like the echo of reality in order to confirm what you are saying and to answer your question.

Surat al Fatiha is the most important *Sura* in the Qur'an. If it is completely absorbed, and if every word comes from a pure heart, you will cease to talk about opening and you will recognize that the vastness of Allah's mercy is never-ending, so you can only strive to increase, for after the constriction of ignorance, there can only come the expansion of knowledge.